

The Epistle and Gospel Readings at the Liturgy on the Feast of The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ

THE EPISTLE OF THE HOLY APOSTLE PAUL TO THE GALATIANS

4:4-7



Stavronikita Monastery**
Mount Athos, Greece.
16th century.

You Are no Longer Slaves but Children of God

⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

⁵ To redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba^[1], Father!"

⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ^[2].

(New King James Version, 1982)

1. Abba — from the Aramaic, *father*. A warm manner used by children to address their fathers.
2. Christ — from the Greek, *the Anointed*.

The Epistle to the Galatians was written by Apostle Paul in 56 A.D. in the town of Ephesus*, during his third missionary journey. It was addressed to the inhabitants of the Roman province of Galatia, descendants of the ancient Gauls (one of the Celtic tribes), who in the 3rd century B.C. came from the banks of the river Rhine and settled in the central portion of Asia Minor, present day Turkey.

The purpose for writing the epistle was to counteract the teachings of Judaizing heretics who maintained that for salvation one had to abide by certain rites of the Jewish religion, especially circumcision.

The main teaching of this Epistle is that all people, not only Jews, are called by the Lord to join the Church He established, and that salvation in the Church is attained not by compliance with the rites of the Mosaic Law, but by a faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and by expressing this faith in works of love for one's neighbor.

The fourth chapter exhorts the readers to cease to be bound by the Old Testament rites. Verses 4-7 recount the fact that God had sent us His Only begotten Son and through Christ has made us His heirs.

*) Ephesus — an ancient Greek center of commerce, arts and learning in Asia Minor, on the shore of the Aegean Sea. In the Roman period, it was for many years the second largest city of the Roman Empire. The ruins of the ancient Ephesus are located in present day Turkey, not far from the city of Izmir.

**) Stavronikita Monastery — an Eastern Orthodox monastery founded in the 10th century on Mt. Athos, in Greece. According to Athonite tradition, the monastery got its name from a legend that at the site where it was founded lived a hermit who manufactured crosses. *Stavronikita* — from the Greek "Cross of Nikita."

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MATTHEW

2:1-12

Magi Worship the Christ Child

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men^[1] from the East came to Jerusalem, saying,

² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

⁶ 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'" (Micah 5:2)

⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.

⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.

¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh^[2].

¹² Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

(New King James Version, 1982)

1. Wise men — *Magi*, scholarly people who observed and studied the stars. At that time people believed that upon the birth of a great person there would appear in the heavens a new star. When such a new and extraordinary star appeared, the wise men from distant Persia or Babylonia, who knew of the coming into the world of the Messiah (the Anointed One), understood that the awaited King had been born. They prepared for the journey and went to the capital of Judea, Jerusalem, to worship Him. Tradition tells us the names of these wise men: Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar — they later became Christians.
2. By their gifts, the wise men attested that the young Child is King, God and Man. Gold was presented to Him as to a King. Frankincense was presented to Him as to God. In ancient Israel, frankincense was blended with other aromatic substances to make incense for use exclusively for worship services. Myrrh was presented to Him as to a Man, who will taste death. Combined with oils aromatic myrrh was used for embalming the deceased. Throughout antiquity frankincense and myrrh were objects of lucrative trade between the southern Arabia and countries of the eastern Mediterranean. The price of these aromatic gum resins, by weight, was comparable to the price of gold.



Stavronikita Monastery
Mount Athos, Greece. 10th century.

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